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## PASCAL'S WAGER.

A certain rustic moralist in Mr. Thomas Hardy's "Far from the Madding Crowd" gives his opinion about the relative chances of salvation contingent on attending church or chapel in the following homely but telling terms:

"We know very well that if anybody goes to heaven they [chapel-folk] will. They've worked hard for it and they deserve to have it, such as 'tis. I'm not such a fool as to pretend that we who stick to the church have the same chance as they, because we know we have not. But I hate a feller who'll change his old ancient doctrine for the sake of getting to heaven."

So far the excellent Coggan, for such is the name of Mr. Hardy's pot-house philosopher. Whether churchmen or directors should be credited with the better chance of salvation is a deep question in which I do not now propose to enter. The Conformist and the Nonconformist conscience may safely be left to take care of themselves. But the ingenuous confidences of this particular churchman suggest a problem of wider interest on which I propose to offer a few remarks. Is there any method of salvation that may be called distinctly mean? I believe there is at least one such, and I am sorry to say that it is a method recommended by no less an authority than Pascal.

What the French call "le pari de Pascal"—in English Pascal's wager or bet—forms the theme of one of the most celebrated passages in his fragmentary defence of Christianity, published after his death and universally known as the "Pensées." A very elaborate edition of this work, filling three large volumes in the great series of French classics which is one of the glories of French bibliography, has recently appeared.<sup>1</sup> Nearly the whole of the first volume is occupied by an elaborate Introduction in which all the literary facts necessary for the full understanding of Pascal's position are brought together. Then comes a presumably immaculate text accompanied by an ample array of critical and explanatory notes, the *Thoughts*

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<sup>1</sup> The references in this article are to this edition.

themselves being so arranged in sections as to exhibit themselves to the best logical advantage; and the whole is completed by what is rare in French books, an excellent index. So far as externals go we cannot expect that this splendid and sombre genius will ever make a better appearance before the world than in M. Léon Brunschvicg's edition.

Pascal's apologetics are as obsolete as his satire on the Jesuits is fresh and living. The higher criticism has ruined his theory of Christian evidences. Evolution has ruined his theory of the Fall. And what some modern mathematicians defend with arguments no more solid than his would not have been recognized by him as the true faith. But one, at least, of his points has secured an undying literary interest from the extraordinary energy and passion with which the case is put rather than from any peculiar ingenuity or originality in the thought itself. This is the argument of the wager to which I have already referred.

It runs as follows. Speaking by the light of nature, says Pascal, God, supposing him to exist, must be out of relation to ourselves. Being without parts or limits he is infinitely incomprehensible. We can neither know what he is nor even that he is. This admission goes beyond that form of modern Agnosticism according to which we can say with certainty that the Unknowable exists, but not what it is. And of course it goes very far beyond Herbert Spencer's affirmation of an Unknowable which is infinite, eternal, an energy, and the cause of all things. But we are not to take so skeptical a confession as defining Pascal's own position. Being a Christian he has other sources of information than the light of nature. His supposed sceptic—who turns out to be a very real sceptic with a place in French literary history—has none. But the sceptic's ignorance cuts both ways. It leaves the non-existence of God as uncertain as his existence. Reason supplies no means of choosing between the two alternative possibilities. Nevertheless we are obliged to back one side or the other, to play at a game of hazard in which, at an infinite distance, heads or tails will turn up. "But," answers the sceptic, "I do not want to play at all; in such a doubtful case as what you describe

prudence bids us abstain." To which Pascal replies, "You must bet; you are in for it; it does not depend on your will." For as his Port Royalist editors put it in an elucidatory addition to the text, "Not to bet is to bet for the non-existence of God."

Plato observes in the "Republic" that he "hardly ever met a mathematician who could reason" (531 E). So at least Jowett translates the passage—not perhaps without a spice of malice. According to some the word he uses (*διαλεκτικοί*) does not exactly imply what we mean by ability to reason. But I think it will be admitted to imply the power so signally displayed by Plato himself in the "Parmenides"—the power, that is, of exhaustively enumerating the possible issues in a given question, and of deducing the necessary consequences in each instance. And it seems to me that, whatever may be the case with modern mathematicians as a class, Pascal shows himself remarkably deficient in that sort of dialectical ability, so much so indeed as to ruin the basis of his whole argument at the very start. The deficiency may or may not be connected with his great mathematical genius; anyhow it is there.

Why must I bet? No reason whatever is given, but it needs only a very slight acquaintance with the dogmatic Christianity of Pascal's time to supply what he leaves unsaid. To be saved man must believe positively in the existence of God: to leave it an open question is to incur the same penalty as complete atheism, that is, eternal damnation.

Here we come at once on a flagrant self-contradiction which even if it stood alone would leave the sceptic triumphant. Pascal began by saying that God, as infinite, is unrelated to us (*il n'a nul rapport à nous.*) But if so he can neither save nor damn us: our future fate has nothing to do with his existence or non-existence, still less with our opinion or absence of opinion on the subject.

I do not profess to know much about the turf; but I strongly suspect that anyone who had such loose notions as Pascal about the laws of betting, if he acted on them, would soon be cleared out of every penny he possessed; that is, supposing his ignorance to be real; while if it were assumed for the purpose of eluding

payment, he would before long find himself turned off every race-course in England.

However, we will let that pass. We will suppose that the phrase "out of relation" slipped in by an unfortunate oversight and would have been deleted had the author lived to see his work through the press; noting, however, that they were allowed to stand by the logicians of Port Royal who otherwise made free enough with his manuscript. Let it be granted as not impossible that the infinite Being, if he exists, is no other than the God of Catholicism. But there is a long way from possibility to certainty, and Pascal himself has warned us that the knowledge, if any, of God's existence is quite distinct from the knowledge of his attributes. Assuming there to be a God, that bare fact leaves us in absolute ignorance about his character. Now it might fairly be contended that the number of different characters which may possibly be ascribed to an infinite being is infinite, and even infinite in the second degree on account of the possible permutations and combinations of attributes. Accordingly the conditions of the wager must be altered. Pascal has appealed to the light of reason and to reason he must go. Apart from objective evidence, of which there is at present no question, the chances against his theology being true are at least infinity to one.

It is, however, on the cards that Pascal, admitting so much, might still maintain that a man of sense was justified in staking his life on the existence of God. In order to make this clear we must examine the conditions of the wager.

"If you win," he tells us, "you win everything; if you lose, you lose nothing." In the more concrete language of religious belief, if there is a God and you have faith in his promises you gain everlasting felicity; if there is no God, death ends all. It is not precisely explained what is meant by staking your life; but as Pascal is addressing himself to a careless worldling he must be supposed to mean what such a person would call "life"; that is to say, an existence of sensual and social enjoyment. The author of the *Thoughts* would not admit that the abandonment of such a life involved any real sacrifice; and so far the serious moralist of any religion or of no religion would not be

disposed to quarrel with him. In fact, as we shall see presently, there is much more involved, certainly more than the sage who finds life "very tolerable without its amusements" is prepared to give up.

Of course no Christian, and Pascal less than another, believes that eternal felicity can be won as the fruit of such a cold-blooded calculation, such brutal cynicism, to use M. Sully Prudhomme's blunt phrase,<sup>2</sup> as would seem to be implied by the aleatory proceeding recommended. Simply as a bet it would to the Searcher of all hearts be no more than the celebrated short prayer, "O God, if there be a God, save my soul, if I have a soul!" In fact, it is only the first step towards acquiring a genuine conviction. And Pascal does not leave us in doubt about the second step. His sceptic is made to reply, "I fully acknowledge the force of your reasoning. But is there no way of seeing the faces of the cards?" "Yes, there are the Scriptures, etc." "But what if I am so constituted that I cannot believe?" "Do what others in your position have done before. Act as if you believed; take holy water, attend Mass, etc. The natural effect of all that will be to make you believe and to stupify you (*vous abêtira*)."<sup>3</sup> "But that is just what I am afraid of." "Why so, what have you to lose?"

I do not think that such a method would commend itself to the ingenuous mind of Mr. Hardy's rustic. I fear Coggan would "hate a feller" who submitted to such a degradation "for the sake of getting to heaven." Even the Port Royal editors were ashamed to print this precious advice, softening it down into a harmless recommendation to imitate the conduct of believers. Victor Cousin was the first to publish the words as they were originally written. That brilliant rhetorician was neither a deep nor a sincere thinker; but he still retained some respect for truth and reason. He asked, was that then the last word of human wisdom, and can we only approach the supreme Intelligence by the sacrifice of our own? But nowadays among orthodox Frenchmen Victor Cousin would pass for a dangerous

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<sup>2</sup> In his article entitled "Le Sens et la Portée du Pari de Pascal," in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of November 15, 1890.

character, an "intellectual." M. Brunschvicg defends Pascal by putting a sense on his words which they will not bear. "S'abêtir," he tells us, means no more than that we should get rid of the prejudices which stand in the way of faith. Surely if so great a writer wanted to say this he had command enough of the French language to say it for himself. A course of dogmatic theology, however disagreeable, would be more effective against rationalistic prejudices than a course of holy water. Pascal was a shrewd observer and understood the effect of mechanical devotion better perhaps than his apologist. One need only study the faces in a Bavarian *Corpus Domini* procession or at a Breton *Pardon* to see what "abêtissement" means.

Besides a natural if sinful objection to part with his reason, the sceptic has still a difficulty. The hope of salvation is all very well, but against the happiness it gives we have to set the fear of hell. To which Pascal replies, sensibly enough from his point of view: Which has more reason to fear it, he who remains in ignorance if there be a hell, with the certainty of being damned if there is one, or he who is certainly persuaded of its existence, with the hope of being saved if it does exist?

This is a very important passage. Both Ernest Havet in his notes to the "Pensées" and M. Sully Prudhomme in his essay on the wager, have assumed, as not needing discussion, that backing the wrong side involves not only the loss of eternal felicity, but also the positive payment of an infinite penalty under the form of everlasting torment. A more recent critic, however, repudiates their interpretation. The eminent philosopher M. Lachelier, writing in the *Revue Philosophique* (June, 1901, p. 625), declares peremptorily that hell has no place in the wager. As the terms are first stated it certainly is not mentioned; but to insist on the omission seems more like a lawyer than a philosopher. And even from the strictly legal point of view M. Lachelier's contention seems unjustifiable. In drawing out the full significance of the wager we have a right to interpret its conditions in the light of its author's known and unconcealed opinions about the future fate of unbelievers. To say that I am obliged to bet must mean that my refusal would entail the

same consequences as if I betted against God's existence and lost. And that must be more than the mere privation of eternal felicity, for so much the sceptic is already prepared to face with equanimity. Besides when he asks to see the faces of the cards played Pascal refers him to Scripture for information, and we know that in the eyes of a seventeenth century Catholic, Scripture consigns the infidel to eternal torment.

One is almost ashamed to labor so obvious a point. But it is a question of some interest why the chance of damnation is left to be inferred when it might have been made to figure with such tremendous effect in the wager as originally stated. I apprehend that the reason is one of simple politeness. Pascal, as Walter Pater reminds us,<sup>3</sup> was a gentleman; and the sceptic for whose benefit he started the whole idea of making the supreme verities a subject of betting, was also a gentleman and a dear friend of his, the Chevalier de Méré, a man of the world, and apparently like others of the kind, a gamester. That is why Pascal addresses him in terms borrowed from the favorite amusement of his class, and that is also, I suggest, why he spares him words not suited to polite ears. Both, however, understand perfectly what the truth of the Catholic theory would imply. A losing bettor not only misses infinite happiness, but has to pay the stakes by suffering infinite misery. And with great tact the first reference to this unpleasant aspect of the wager is put into the mouth not of the Christian advocate, but of the hesitating sceptic. Méré, not Pascal, is made responsible for introducing it into the discussion. To convince ourselves that the softening down of the risk incurred by infidelity is a mere concession to the rules of personal politeness, we need only turn to the passages where Pascal has to deal with mankind in general. Here the loss of felicity is not mentioned as a motive for belief. With his usual and incomparable splendor of rhetoric he describes death as infallibly destined to place the impious and indifferent under the horrible necessity of submitting either to eternal annihilation or to eternal misery without knowing which of these eternities has

<sup>3</sup> "Works," Vol. VIII, p. 63.

been prepared for them forever.<sup>4</sup> And this alternative, such as it is, must not be thought of as existing objectively in the nature of things, or rather in the unknown purposes of Providence, but subjectively in the reasonable apprehensions of the doubter.

Judged by Jesuit or modern Ultramontane standards the author of the "Provinciales" and the "Pensées" may have been a heretic. But he was far too good a Catholic to entertain for a moment the idea that hell could mean annihilation. He speaks *ad hominem*. If you are right in your unbelief you will cease to exist at death; if you are wrong you will certainly be tormented forever.

So much being established let us return to the wager and its implications. It was presented under the form of an even chance, with nothing to lose (except one's reason) on the one event, and everything to gain on the other. One is struck by the suspicious resemblance to a plea sometimes advanced for trying a quack remedy. It may do good and it can't do harm. Now in the case of a drug about which we know nothing—for the modesty of that "may do good" is really a confession of complete ignorance—the possibility of harm is precisely measured by the possibility of benefit. For us the chances are equal, because either event is no more than a chance. And an attentive examination shows that Pascal's reasoning suffers from the same fatal flaw.

From respect for so great a name two enormous assumptions have been let pass. We withdrew our objection to the logical impossibility that a Being out of all relation to man can affect man's future fate. And we accepted as an even chance the infinitesimally small probability that an infinite personality, supposing it to exist, has exactly the character of the God in whom Jansenist Catholics believed. But our concessions do not end here. What security has Méré that in accepting the wager he sacrifices no more than his reason and the healthy enjoyment of life? "You have," says his friend, "the word of God." Is that so certain? or is it a sufficient

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<sup>4</sup> II, p. 121.

guarantee? It will not do to call the question blasphemous, for our moralist has imbued us with the idea that truth is a matter of geography, and we know what the Nicene Creed would be called across the straits of Gibraltar.

Here we have the nemesis of agnosticism as a method of faith. A universal solvent is created and then poured into some consecrated chalice in the ingenuous expectation that the holy vessel will resist its corrosive action. In a series of brilliant aphorisms congealing the loose and lazy scepticisms of Montaigne into a hailstorm of diamond-pointed epigrams, Pascal had denounced the supposed eternal laws of human morality as a set of arbitrary expedients, varying from country to country, and merely intended to win respect for the authority of their princes. From such a discordant medley of customs no fixed moral standard or natural system of ethics can be elicited. Still less can our ideas of what is right and good be applied to the criticism of God's ways with man. Anterior to revelation we cannot predicate morality, more than any other attribute, of the infinite Being; nor can a self-revealing Deity be expected to act in conformity with human notions of right and wrong when those notions are not conformable with one another.

Pascal accepts the consequences of his sceptical theology with cynical candor. "What," he exclaims, "can be more opposed to our wretched rules of justice than the eternal damnation of a child without any will of its own for a sin in which it seems to have had so little share that it was committed six thousand years before the said child came into existence?"<sup>5</sup> In fact, moral distinctions are created by God; and "the sole reason why sins are sins is that they are contrary to his will."<sup>6</sup> Were the whole human race to be eternally damned God would stand acquitted of injustice.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless with an inconsistency not uncommon among sceptics Pascal recognizes one kind of moral obligation as universally binding, so much so as even to impose itself on

<sup>5</sup> II, p. 348.

<sup>6</sup> III, p. 104.

<sup>7</sup> I, p. 125.

God in his relations to man. And that is the obligation of keeping a promise. It is mentioned quite naïvely as a self-evident truth, valid apparently on both sides of the Pyrenees. "There is a reciprocal duty between God and man . . . God is bound to fulfil his promises."<sup>7a</sup> If we have backed the winning card the stakes will be honestly paid.

I know not what answer the Chevalier de Méré made to the aleatory apologetics of his illustrious friend; but his conversion was delayed so long as probably to have been effected by considerations of a different order. He might well have required a better security for the divine fidelity than Pascal's guarantee. It seems rather rash to infer that because a gentleman keeps his word and pays his debts of honor, the Jansenist God will. A Being who is wholly unaccountable may mean something different from what he says, or the exact opposite, or nothing at all. An irresponsible despot is generally not less remarkable for perfidy than for cruelty. He who predestines little children to eternal damnation may quite possibly be reserving the Sisters of Port Royal for the same fate. We were told that the whole human race might justly be so treated, and how do we know that the full divine right may not after all be exercised. "We have the word of a King for our Church, and of a King who was never worse than his word." Such was the confident answer of the English bishops to those who suspected the intentions of James II. History tells how their credulity was rewarded.

What is more, Pascal's interpretation of Scripture goes to prove that deceit and treachery are among the revealed attributes of his God. A particularly nauseous quality of that personage is that, not content with exercising his undoubted privilege of damning human beings at sight, he tries to manufacture a colorable pretext for their condemnation by introducing difficulties into the Bible. "There is obscurity enough to blind the reprobate, and clearness enough to make them inexcusable."<sup>8</sup> "Do you suppose that the prophecies quoted in

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<sup>7a</sup> III, pp. 277-8.

<sup>8</sup> III, p. 23.

the New Testament are mentioned to make you believe? No, it is to prevent you from believing.”<sup>9</sup> The whole Jewish people were purposely blinded to the real meaning of the Messianic prophesies in order that their rejection of Jesus Christ might render them unsuspected witnesses to the authenticity of the evidentiary documents committed to their charge. Had they accepted the gospel it might have been said that they had forged the predictions by which its supernatural origin is attested and of whose antiquity their word is the sole guarantee.<sup>10</sup>

It would surprise me to learn that there was any greater distortion of truth and justice in the casuistry of Escobar than in the sophistry of his Jansenist satirist. And the Jesuits if they erred had at least the excuse of erring on the side of mercy. They constructed fire-escapes where Pascal opens *oubliettes*.

Our only knowledge of God, our only proof that there is a God comes through the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament and their fulfilment in Jesus Christ. But it is of the very essence of these prophecies to be ambiguous and misleading. We asked to be shown the cards with which that awful game for our soul's salvation is being played “at an infinite distance,” and our wish has been gratified: the cards are no other than the pages of Scripture. And now we learn that their color and value depend entirely on the inscrutable will of the dealer. He can call black red and a king a knave. He can change trumps at pleasure and count an ace as eleven points or as one. That is how his antitype Napoleon played chess, moving the pieces just as he liked, regardless of rules. Our Ariel-souled thinker constructs a God meaner if not more malignant than the Setebos of Caliban, in that wonderful study of Robert Browning's which is also such a scathing satire on the creed of his youth. Granting that such a person exists our conduct cannot be affected one way or the other by the fact. As we cannot take his word for anything we are exactly in the same position as if he had never spoken. Perhaps after all he

<sup>9</sup> III, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> III, p. 16 ff.

is less amenable to the charms of adulation and submission than his more abject adorers would have us believe. Our moral superiority over him may at last make its ascendancy felt. Possibly in that case his first impulse would be to wreak vengeance on the reptile souls who sought to stupefy their reason by the copious use of masses and holy water. Then we who never stooped to that degradation will intercede with the converted Moloch for the shivering wretches, who may escape with no worse penalty than transmigration into the bodies of apes.

Briefly, then, the existence of an infinite Being out of relation to ourselves cannot possibly influence our future fate. In the absence of positive evidence it remains infinitely improbable that an infinite Being, actively related to us should have a character identical with that of the Jansenist deity. Assuming such a deity to exist, the chances are precisely equal that he will or that he will not behave towards us in any particular manner. Therefore, so far as theology goes, Méré is rationally justified in adopting the line of conduct that seems most agreeable to his own desires. When the door of death opens it is even betting whether the lady or the tiger will receive him.

Metaphor apart, no revelation can be of any practical value unless it is assumed to come from a person whose word we can trust. But the veracity of God is only guaranteed by his general moral perfection, and such perfection can only be conceived as the consummation of human goodness. But goodness includes justice as known to us by earthly examples, and these, according to Pascal himself, forbid us to believe that innocent little children can merit eternal torments—or, we may add, that Méré could merit them for honestly using his reason to find out the truth, or even the judges of Galileo for suppressing it. In theology the method of Descartes is a surer guide than the method of Montaigne.

The idea of accepting Christianity (understood in an orthodox sense) as a probability which seems safer to believe than to disbelieve has been traced back to Arnobius, from whom Pascal is supposed to have derived it through Raymond Sebon, whose "Natural Theology" he had certainly read. But the

after fortunes of the argument are more interesting than its origin. It had the singular good fortune to be taken up by Butler and made the very keynote of his "Analogy," whence it passed to the leaders of the Tractarian Movement, betraying its inherent weakness by the conflicting interpretations respectively put on it by Newman and Keble.

I do not know whether Butler had or had not read Pascal; but his theory of probability as applied to the evidences of Christianity is a distinct improvement on the wager, in so far as it encourages instead of abolishing the use of reason. On the other hand, his appeal to the most degrading of all "pragmatic" motives is considerably more explicit, and will hardly be denied even by the most unscrupulous of apologists. After detailing the arguments for revealed religion based on the performance of miracles and the fulfilment of prophecy, he shows an uneasy consciousness of their insufficiency, but urges as a make-weight that "a mistake on the one side may be, in its consequences, much more dangerous than a mistake on the other."<sup>11</sup> Butler alleges, it is true, that he gives this ominous warning not to influence the judgment but the practice of his readers. The distinction, however, is not easy to grasp, nor is any attempt made to illustrate it. If his sole object was to strengthen the motives for virtuous action irrespective of creed he ought to have made his meaning plainer. Many of the Deists would have agreed with him in recommending a high and pure standard of morality, while they deprecated the attempt to compromise it by a reference to selfish hopes or fears. In any case judgment and practice cannot be isolated from one another nor made amenable to different orders of motives, least of all when we are discussing a creed most of whose advocates consider that a man is morally responsible for his belief. It is difficult not to think that Butler knew this, although he avoids committing himself to an open use of the argument *ad terrorem*. Nor will any reservation make his theoretical assumption anything but a gross fallacy. There is no safe side in religion for there is no experience to show where

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<sup>11</sup> "Analogy," Part II, chap. vii, sub fin.

safety lies. To seek safety may, for aught we know, be the most dangerous, as it is certainly the most pusillanimous of choices.

In the controversy between theology and rationalism it requires a greater effort of abstraction than most minds are capable of to grasp this possibility and to appreciate its bearing on the aleatory method of belief. And as between Roman Catholicism and the various Protestant sects all doubt would vanish. The superior safety of belonging to the Church which alone claimed to monopolize the means of salvation was constantly urged as a motive for submitting to its pretensions, and proved in fact a most efficacious method of proselytism. Henry of Navarre is said to have put the argument in a particularly pointed form. The Protestant divines whom he consulted on the subject reluctantly admitted that he might be saved if he became a Catholic. The Catholic divine told him without hesitation that he would certainly be damned if he remained a Protestant. He therefore chose that side which by universal agreement offered the best prospect of escaping from perdition. What the great King had offered more than half in irony as an excuse for his politic apostasy was accepted in deadly earnest by many persons of quality in England under Charles I as a reason for deserting the cause of the Reformation. Charles II's deathbed conversion was probably dictated by the same motive, and if so would be a crowning example of the adroit opportunism by which his whole life was distinguished. In this as in other respects the ablest of all the Stuarts bore a close resemblance to his grandfather, the ablest of the Bourbons. When Butler wrote the danger from Rome had greatly diminished, but had not wholly disappeared, as we learn from Neal's "History of the Puritans" (1732) and Middleton's "Free Enquiry" (1747).<sup>12</sup> It is therefore rather surprising that he did not observe what consequences might be drawn from an argument, perhaps derived from Pascal, in favor of Pascal's creed.

If English churchmen did not draw the logical consequences

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<sup>12</sup> The date of the "Analogy" is 1736.

of their greatest champion's apologetic method, their escape is due not only to the happy inconsistency of the theological intellect but also to the pervasive influence of eighteenth century rationalism, extending as it did far beyond the small circle of avowed free-thinkers. Whatever else Englishmen might believe, their own Deists and the Voltairean movement abroad gradually convinced them that Popery was a superstition too absurd for even a Frenchman to accept—destined to speedy extinction, Horace Walpole thought, if the ill-advised abrogation of our penal laws had not given it a new lease of life. It would have surprised the dilettante of Strawberry Hill to hear that his own experiments in Gothic architecture had rather more to do with the dreaded revival of mediæval faith than the repeal of some obsolete statutes. Anyhow, by accident or otherwise, he proved a true prophet. Whether as grim wolf or good shepherd, two centuries after "Lycidas" Rome once more put in play the arts against which Milton had raised his warning voice. Or rather the natural magnetism exercised by the larger on the smaller body acted without the help of any direct proselytism on the part of Jesuits or others to disintegrate the Church of England and to draw its detached fragments into the central orb of Christendom.

Now it is interesting to note that in this process the method of Pascal and Butler played an important part, and was appealed to with confidence by both parties, by those who clung to the Via Media of Anglicanism and by those who scorned it as an illogical compromise between the right way and the wrong.

Cardinal Newman briefly refers to Butler's doctrine of probability as the guide of life as that whence his own theory of faith took its rise. Keble treats it at much greater length, and in particular connection with the issue on which he and his greater friend parted company in a very interesting but little read document, the preface to his "Sermons, Academical and Occasional," published in 1847, soon after Newman's secession.

The principle in question is stated as follows: "In practical matters of eternal import, the safer way is always to be preferred, even though the excess of seeming evidence may tell in

any degree on the opposite side. Thus if one mode of acting imply that there is an eternity and another contradict it . . . the tremendous, overwhelming interest at stake ought to determine a man's conduct to the affirmative side. He should act, in spite of seeming evidence, as if eternity were true.”<sup>13</sup>

Keble had not the same lingering regard for truth as such that still distinguishes Butler, and the context clearly shows that “acting” meant not merely conformity to Christian ethics but also adhesion to the Catholic creed, which, in the supposed circumstances, some, among whom the present writer is one, would call in plain language, cowardly and deceitful.

Fortunately, or rather inevitably, systematized immorality is suicidal; and a recent incident has reminded us that when sailors fall into a panic they are apt to fire into their own ships. Keble very frankly admits that “the principles of Butler and Pascal” cannot be limited to “the controversy with unbelievers.”<sup>14</sup> And if personally he had been disposed so to limit them Newman would not have allowed him to stop short. So he proceeds to state the argument for going over to Rome in terms which I shall not transcribe as they are substantially identical with the Bourbon argument (white plume argument, let us call it) already quoted.

Keble's way of getting out of it is amazing, and practically amounts to an abandonment of the whole principle. It is that “the argument put in this form proves too much, for it would equally show that Puritanism or Mahometanism, or the ancient Donatism, or any other exclusive system, is the safer way.”<sup>15</sup> And he also goes on to remark, rather late in the day, that there seems to be something “cold and ungenerous” about the method—in short what we call mean. Accordingly it is to be reserved for the exclusive benefit of unbelievers, and not mentioned in controversies among Christians. Kicking down the ladder by which we have risen is a policy with which persons of this class have made us familiar; but the ladder has been known successfully to resist such treatment. Or, to employ a perhaps more

<sup>13</sup> Op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Op. cit., pp. 7, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Op. cit., p. 14.

relevant illustration, when a familiar spirit is sent for water to wash out the house, he has a trick of bringing bucket after bucket until the whole town is flooded and its inhabitants drowned. There is an Orthodox Church, not less positive in its anathemas than Rome, and growing at a far more rapid rate; while the immemorial Asiatic religions bide their time, "in patient deep disdain" for the pretensions of parvenu European establishments.

Pascal's method was destined to one more singular development before it silently took its place among the obsolete weapons of religious controversy. With the collapse of the Tractarian Movement the rationalistic movement which it had temporarily arrested returned in a flood, and before many years had passed became predominant at Oxford, at least among her more serious and intellectual residents. To meet this new danger Mansel delivered his famous Bampton Lectures in 1858. He does not, I think, ever mention the argument *ad terrorem*, but he follows Pascal in denying that our moral distinctions are applicable to the proceedings of an infinite Being about whose real nature we are totally ignorant; and he follows Butler in contending that every other system is open to as many objections as Christianity, or rather as his own particular version of Christianity.

Mansel was hailed by his admirers as a second Butler; but the reception of his work by the intellectual public generally showed that such methods had passed out of date. I question whether in the controversy that it provoked a single name of distinction is to be found on his side. Against him were such writers as F. D. Maurice, James Martineau, R. H. Hutton, and Professor Goldwin Smith. Herbert Spencer, accepting his premises, pushed them to the length of an Agnosticism which absolutely excluded belief in revealed religion, and reduced natural religion to the most attenuated of abstractions. But the most resounding stroke of all came from John Stuart Mill. In the course of his destructive attack on the philosophy of Mansel's teacher, Sir William Hamilton, the great thinker and moralist, then at the very height of his fame and power, turns aside to tear up the flimsy pretences under which the Bampton

Lecturer on the "Limits of Religious Thoughts" had attempted to eliminate morality from religion. Pascal is not named; but here at last Pascal's method receives its final quietus. Convince me, says Mill, that the world is ruled by an infinite Being of whom I know nothing except that his proceedings are incompatible with the highest human morality, "and I will bear my fate as I may. But there is one thing he shall not do: he shall not compel me to worship him. I will call no being good who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow-creatures; and if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him, to hell I will go."<sup>16</sup>

Mansel sneeringly forbore "to comment on the temper and taste of this declamation."<sup>17</sup> But what he said or did not say mattered equally little. The ghastly idol had fallen and fallen forever.

It has been said by some who are in full sympathy with Mill's contention that the sentiment here expressed, however admirable, is irreconcilable with his utilitarian ethics. I am not so sure of that. The moral degradation of worshiping an omnipotent demon through eternity might conceivably be more painful than any punishment in his power to inflict. Or on finding himself defied he might "tak' a thought and men'"—to the great increase of the general felicity. But there seems a sort of pedantry about such considerations. The supreme ironies are partly serious; supreme seriousness is a little ironical. There is such a phrase as "I bet you all to nothing," and as the language of the gaming-table has once been introduced it may here be appropriately used as best describing Mill's position. There is no more than an infinitesimally small chance that Mansel's non-moral theology may be true; but neither on that chance nor on any other will a high-principled human soul forfeit its self-respect.

My object has been to show that to incur either intellectual or moral degradation on a calculation of selfish interest would be not only mean but unavailing. For with the limitation of

<sup>16</sup> "Examinations of Sir W. Hamilton's Philosophy," (3d ed.) p. 124.

<sup>17</sup> "Philosophy of the Conditioned," p. 168.

our knowledge assumed by the theologians who appeal to such motives there is no safe side, the chances either way being precisely equal whatever attitude towards the hidden arbiter of our destiny we assume. It remains that our conduct should be determined by considerations equally applicable whether the supernatural does or does not exist.

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### THE ARGUMENT FOR IMMORTALITY.

There is without doubt at the present day a strong inclination in many quarters to dispute the importance of a belief in immortality, both for the practical conduct of life and for our intellectual constructions about the nature of the world. It is because I think that the religious feeling of mankind is truer here than the current tendencies, and that, instead of standing on the outskirts of the philosopher's task, as at best a work of supererogation, the question has a distinct importance for general philosophical results, that I wish in the following pages to inquire just what the significant point in the argument for immortality really is.

And as a means of approaching the question, it will be useful first to review briefly the general character of the historical proofs for the belief. It lies outside my purpose to dwell here upon the specifically Christian proof from revelation, except indeed as this is capable of a philosophical statement. When Paul speaks of life and immortality as brought to light through the Gospel, in part, I suppose, he means that the Christian revelation has been a revelation of the divineness of human life. No one, therefore, to whom this has once come home in its full power, can doubt that life is a permanent fact in God's universe, not to be broken off arbitrarily; that each man, as a recipient of God's love, and a co-worker with him, has a value which is eternal. In so far, this will enter into what I have to say later on. But certainly Paul also has in mind the historical fact of Christ's resurrection, as the basis of the Christian's hope. Of course, in so far as the historical evidence seems